

of the activity that night. Despite dispute over his actions, Thompson was arrested and charged with assault with a deadly weapon against the streetcar conductor. The *Wilmington Evening Dispatch* editorialized that it looked as if “citizens of Brooklyn would need their new Winchesters.”¹⁹

Since emancipation, African Americans had felt a strong compulsion to vote; however, during the white supremacy campaign, exercising the right of suffrage had become dangerous. An African American paper from Kinston reportedly encouraged the black voter to go to the polls on election day and “stick to the Republican Party because it had freed him.”²⁰ A Wilmington resident echoed this sentiment when she suggested that the average black held “a most exalted opinion of the value of his vote” because he “imagines the whole constitution will fall to pieces if his vote fails it.” Despite threats that they would be fired if they registered to vote, blacks called the Democrats’ bluff and registered to vote in the November elections. Many found themselves discharged from their jobs for exercising their right to vote.²¹

Robert Mason, a manager for the North Carolina Cotton Oil Company, noted that several of his black employees had voted but that most did not. He said, “[A] great many people have made a mistake in discharging old and faithful servants because I think sooner or later they will have to take them back, although, of course, such

an idea is hooted at now.” Mason believed that blacks were the “least troublesome labor we can handle” and observed that “their natural disposition when unmolested by mean white people is to know their places and keep in them.”²² Chief of Police Melton testified that Wilmington’s black population was “scared” and that a “great many” came to him to tell him they were not going to register or vote because “they thought more of their lives than they did of their votes or politics.” Despite intimidation and promises of blacks not to vote, Democrats were still wary because after the final registration tallies were in, 2,965 blacks and 2,918 whites had registered to vote.²³

African American women also took part in the political process. In late October, an article from “an organization of colored ladies” appeared in Manly’s *Daily Record* and was reprinted in white papers. The article urged black men to register and vote in the election despite white threats of being fired for voting. After reprinting the article from the *Daily Record*, the *Messenger* reprimanded the women when it editorialized that “the colored women of this country should be most interested in . . . the education and moral uplifting of their race and less politics.”²⁴ The article in the *Record* was another extension of the women’s “republican aid societies” in the city that refused to be intimidated by the white supremacy campaign because they

¹⁹ As such incidents increased, Fusionist leaders claimed that Democrats paid blacks to incite violence so that the white supremacy campaign would continue to have newsworthy examples of black “insolence.” McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 613; *Morning Star*, (Wilmington), November 6, 1898 and November 8, 1898; *Evening Dispatch*, (Wilmington), November 7, 1898; *Wilmington Messenger*, November 6, 1898.

²⁰ Passage as quoted from the Kinston *Searchlight* and found in Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 292.

²¹ Jane Cronly, n.d., Cronly Papers, Duke University Library, Durham.

²² African American Hamilton Hargrave testified that he was employed by Samuel and William Northrup’s sawmill and was informed that if he and other black employees registered to vote, they would be fired. Despite the threat, he voted in the election. *Contested Election Case*, 349; Robert Mason to Bess, November 8, 1898, John Steele Henderson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill; 1897 *Wilmington City Directory*.

²³ McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 663.

²⁴ *Wilmington Messenger*, October 21, 1898.